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Michael R. Hill

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, michaelhilltemporary1@yahoo.com

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LISTS: STARTING POINTS FOR RESEARCHING AND WRITING THE HISTORIES OF ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS¹

MICHAEL R. HILL
Sociological Origins

The discovery, imaginative construction, and methodical compilation of *lists* is a productive initial strategy for researching and writing the histories of academic department and small professional organizations. When purposefully conceptualized as *inclusive*, list construction provides a methodological framework that curtails the seemingly inherent tendency of historical writers to overlook the contributions and participation of minority members of professional organizations – I use the term “minority” here in the widest possible sense, to indicate virtually anyone who by one criterion or another has come to be defined or perceived as somehow “marginal” or “unimportant” to the historical record you are documenting.

LISTS AND SURVEILLANCE

Being sociologists, let us begin with a formal definition. A *list*, Anthony Giddens notes, is an early form of surveillance technology.² “A list is a formula that tallies objects or persons and can order them relative to one another”³ Giddens considers constructing lists as an early form of *surveillance* that “makes possible the stretching of social relations across broader spans of time and space than can be accomplished in oral cultures.”⁴ This temporal aspect is pertinent to our task as departmental historians, a task that necessarily involves the retrospective crossing of temporal boundaries—beyond our personal experiential domains—to document social relations and inventory

¹ © 2003 by Michael R. Hill. Presented in the Professional Workshop: Writing a Departmental History, organized by Patricia Madoo Lengermann and Jill M. Niebrugge-Brantley, American Sociological Association, 98th Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, August 15-19, 2003.

² Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

organizational patterns in past eras. Thus, we employ lists of names and organizations in part as devices for conducting retrospective surveillance on past activities within departments of sociology.

For our purposes, Giddens identifies *two* types of surveillance. “Surveillance,” he writes:

. . . refers to two related sorts of phenomena. One is the accumulation of “coded information,” which can be used to administer the activities of individuals about whom it is gathered. It is not just the collection of information, but its storage that is important here. Human memory is a storage device, but the storage of information is enhanced vastly by various other kinds of marks or traces that can be used as modes of recording The other sense of surveillance is that of the direct supervision of the activities of some individuals by others in positions of authority over them.⁵

This second category of surveillance, *direct supervision*, is the type on which—in my view—too much historical work in American sociology fundamentally depends. Face-to-face interaction is, of course, the vital stuff of vivid autobiography, lively oral tradition and, unfortunately, considerable disciplinary mythology. The grand supervising professors, recounting their accomplishments as department chairs, record their direct observations, tell anecdotes, and remember the world as they would have it remembered by others. So too, in reverse, the students of such professors recollect—autobiographically—what it was like to be their students. The interactive world of direct surveillance, mutual surveillance, and self-surveillance is a rich, but methodologically tricky source of departmental history—it is often a Goffmanian soup of gratuitous presentation and outright fabrication to be tasted only with care and skepticism.

Human memory is fallible, selective, and limited. Here lies the value of turning, alternatively, to the first category of surveillance defined by Giddens, *i.e.*, to *accumulated coded*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

information preserved in lists. The storage capacity of human memory is, to reprise Giddens, “enhanced vastly” by the use of written marks to construct lists.

DISCOVERING LISTS

Before spending too much of your time identifying and constructing new lists, it is usually worthwhile to discover if any useful lists already exist. The process and strategies for discovering extant lists requires thinking creatively about: (1) what constitutes a *list* and (2) where such lists might be found, ready made. Academic departments typically compile and maintain a wide variety of lists. For example, lists of current and former faculty members, lists of alumni, bibliographies of publications by faculty members, lists of winners of various honors, and so on. Other lists may be initially less obvious, but no less useful. For example, lists of departmental office assignments, departmental telephone and email directories, readings lists for graduate comprehensive examinations, lists of dissertations completed in the department, lists of research leaves granted to faculty members, and so on. In sum, it is productive to sit down with your colleagues and your administrative staff to brainstorm for the purpose of compiling a working list of existing lists.

EVALUATING AND REPAIRING FOUND LISTS

All discovered or found lists may potentially contain errors of omission as well as commission. No found list, no matter how venerated it may be in departmental lore, should be accepted at face value. For example, a presumably carefully maintained list of graduate degrees awarded by a major mid-western university was found on close examination to have omitted the names of nearly a dozen former students, and to have included two students who actually earned their degrees in a different department. In another case, a departmental time-line chart purporting to show the years of service of all current and former faculty members, failed to include the names

of visiting professors who held appointments for two years or less. Administratively, these transient professors had been defined as relatively unimportant, but in terms of the intellectual life of the department they represented a constantly changing influx of vital new ideas and energetic teaching that an attentive departmental historian would not want to miss. The latter example underscores the importance of *inclusiveness* as a valuable property of your lists.

The work required to carefully cross-check and validate the accuracy and inclusiveness of found lists is usually tedious, time consuming, and unavoidable. The possibilities are nearly endless: combing old administrative records, reviewing transcripts, comparing theses and dissertations on library shelves against the titles on a departmental list, and so on. And there is always the haunting reality that the sources used for cross-checking may have errors and exclusions of their own. Careful as you try to be, it is important to realize that some degree of error is likely – and that the extent to which you have erred is practically unknowable. One simply does one’s best to be careful and thoughtful.

CONSTRUCTING NEW LISTS

The more you look for, discover, evaluate, and validate found lists, the more it will occur to you that some lists that you would like to find do not exist. For example, how about a list of all ABD students who never finished their dissertations? Is there a list of faculty who were denied tenure, or were dismissed on morals charges? Is there a list of formal grade appeals, year by year, professor by professor? Is there a comprehensive list of all “guest speakers” over the life of the department? The potential “list of lists that do not exist but that could be compiled” is nearly endless, and is limited only by your imagination and your curiosity. Actually compiling these lists is limited only by your resourcefulness and perseverance, and, often as not, the willingness of administrators to make potentially sensitive data sources available to you. There are reasons why some lists have never been compiled. Lists can be administratively powerful tools, and no

administrator I have ever met will knowingly want to help you construct a list that will cast him or her in a bad light.

SUBLISTS AND LISTS IN COMBINATION

The power of inclusive, well-validated lists, both found and newly compiled multiplies as more and more comprehensive lists are added to your collection of lists. Various sub-lists can be broken out of larger lists. For example, the topics of doctoral dissertations completed by women versus those completed by men. The topics of dissertations completed in the first half of the department's history versus those in more recent years. The topics of dissertations supervised by male faculty compared to those supervised by female faculty, and so on. Lists can be examined in parallel across time. For example, the home institutions of guest speakers compared to those of visiting professors, of first-year graduate students, of tenured faculty, and so on.

Network analyses of professors and students, based on comprehensive and inclusive lists, can provide fascinating insights into the evolution and stability (or instability) of student-teacher relationships and the maintenance and diffusion of intellectual traditions. A particularly interesting pattern, for example, is provided by the early history of sociology at the University of Nebraska, where a complex teacher-student cohort trained in the late 1800s on the Nebraska campus moved to Stanford University for nearly a decade and was finally reconstituted at Nebraska some years after the turn of the century. The relevant point here is to note that documenting the full extent of this pattern of intellectual hegira required access to inclusive lists from *two* schools: Stanford University as well as the University of Nebraska.

LISTS AND ARCHIVES

Most scholars who write departmental histories will spend at least some time digging in formal archives for existing lists, or for data from which to construct or corroborate lists. I have noted elsewhere that extracting information from archives typically requires presenting a list of proper names to the archivist. “The proper names of people and organizations are guiding elements in the social construction of most archival collections.”⁶ Given a list of names—even a list containing only one name—archivists can direct researchers to name-searchable indexes and/or to specific archival collections presumed relevant to the people or organizations specified on the list. This much is experientially obvious to anyone who has successfully negotiated the orientation interviews in well-run archives.

Lists are consequential in archival research for three separate but interrelated reasons: (1) a list of names is a key that opens archival collections, (2) lists discovered in archival collections, such as class rosters, for example, are themselves sources of historical data, and (3), the compilation and construction of new lists based on raw data found in archival materials is a productive technique for organizing historical data for presentation, hypothesis, analysis, and subsequent research.

Given a list of the names of the members of a department, for example, scholars can start asking a host of interrelated questions: When did members join or leave the list? What were the academic ranks of the members on the list? What advanced degrees did they hold? What were the members’ salaries? Where did they live? Where were their offices? What courses did they teach? What books did they read? What were their class sizes? What were their publications? To what professional organizations did they belong? Who were their students? Etc., etc. Materials in college and university archives can frequently help answer such questions.

Answers to the previous questions are typically found in a variety of lists retained in archival repositories on college and university campuses. For example: organizational budgets containing lists of personnel and their salaries, course lists, class schedules, class rosters, grade reports, files of

⁶ Michael R. Hill, *Archival Strategies and Techniques*. (Qualitative Research Methods Series, No. 31). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993.

transcripts (which are themselves lists of grades assigned to students), organizational membership lists, lists of publications (or bibliographies, the compilation of which may depend on library catalogs—another form of list), and so on. Suffice it to say that the world of historical research is replete with many and various types of lists. Given the alarming, exponential rate with which these lists are here multiplying before our eyes, let us briefly consider the nature of the “lists” that we confront and construct.

Lists possess a concrete externality that makes them accessible to others across time and space. Written lists can be fabricated, lists may be incomplete, lists are sometimes in error, and lists can be lost. Nonetheless, the written lists we consult for data and the lists we construct in the course of our research are — *as artifacts* — external to us. Lists can be shared, lists can be photocopied, lists can be intersubjectively verified, compared, corrected, amended, and cross-compiled. These are methodological realities of great importance. Harriet Martineau, sociology’s first methodologist, astutely advised researchers in 1838 to concentrate on “*things*,” by which she meant physical artifacts, official records, and other traces of institutionalized behavior and social organization.⁷ “To arrive at the facts of the condition of a people through the discourse of individuals,” Martineau wrote, “is a hopeless enterprise. The plain truth is—it is beginning at the wrong end.”⁸ Lists are *things*, and frequently they comprise official records that are stored and preserved in archival repositories.

In my view, it is *from* these preserved, externally accessible lists, or from new lists based on compilations of institutionally-recorded and/or institutionally-preserved data/artifacts, that the writing of departmental histories ought fundamentally to proceed. To paraphrase Martineau: *Arriving at the facts of departmental history through the discourse of students and faculty members is a hopeless enterprise*. Let us begin at the other end, with written lists of all sorts, with official

⁷ Michael R. Hill, “Empiricism and Reason in Harriet Martineau’s Sociology,” in *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, by Harriet Martineau. Sesquicentennial edition. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989, p. xvii.

⁸ Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838), with an introduction by Michael R. Hill. Sesquicentennial edition. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989, p. 73.

records, and with other tangible traces of organized social activity as may illuminate our inquiries. When our lists are compiled, when our time-lines are drawn, when our rosters are complete, and our bibliographies are comprehensive, only *then*, should we interview in depth and listen attentively to discourse. If we take Martineau seriously, we will take human discourse and self-report data as secondary, using it to probe the veracity, meaning, and completeness of our lists—to interpret, understand, and debate the historical import of our lists.

APPENDIX: A LIST OF USEFUL LISTS

[Note: Examples under sub-headings are illustrative,
not comprehensive]

I. DEPARTMENT NAMES

(Initially gathered from catalogs, bulletins, etc.).

Sociology
 Sociology and Anthropology
 Anthropology and Sociology
 Sociology, Anthropology, and Geography
 Sociology and Social Work
 Political Economy
 Social Economy
 Economics and Sociology
 Sociology and Political Science
 Institutional History
 Civics and Philanthropy
 Social Anthropology
 Rural Sociology
 Household Economics
 Human Relations
 School of
 Division of
 Institute of
 Etc., etc.

II. FACULTY NAMES

(Initially gathered from campus directories, telephone books, catalogs, bulletins, course schedules, annual budgets, departmental reports, etc.).

Tenured faculty
 Graduate faculty status
 Named professorships
 Professors
 Associates
 Assistants
 Instructors
 Professorial lecturers
 Extension
 Part-time
 Leaves
 Temporary
 Emeritus
 Visiting & Summer Term
 Exchange Faculty
 Resident Scholars
 Adjunct
 Instructorships
 Graduate teaching assistants
 Joint appointments in/from cognate departments
 Extension appointments
 Names of candidates/applicants for positions
 Administrative appointments
 Departmental chairs/heads
 Directors of related institutes, research bureaus
 Committee chairs, e.g., campus-wide tenure committee
 Deans, etc.

Related Questions:

Where did faculty members earn their degrees, when, and in what fields of study?

Undergraduate
 Graduate and/or professional

What awards and honors did faculty receive?

Admiral in the Nebraska Navy
 Honorary degrees
 Nobel Prize

As students, who were their friends and classmates? (see **IV: Student Names**, below, and expand to schools where the faculty went to school).

Where *else* did the faculty members study?

A year abroad in Europe, for example, sans formal degree
 Special workshops or institutes
 Apprenticeships
 Self-directed study
 Significant on-the-job experiences

From whom did the faculty take courses?

Who were their dissertation advisors?

Who did they thank in acknowledgments?

Where did their mentors get *their* degrees? (see **II: Faculty names**, above, and expand to schools where the faculty went to school).

At what other schools did the faculty teach before and after the department of interest?

Who wrote their letters of recommendation?

What additional careers or professions did the faculty members attempt and or engage in before, during, or after appointment in the department of interest? (e.g., law, consulting, government service, farming, housewife/ househusband, medicine, business, clergy, journalism, writing/editing, military service, public lecturing, etc.).

When did faculty members join the department, leave/retire? What were their salaries? Course loads and course assignments? Where did they live (street address)? Office location and address?

III. ORGANIZATIONAL NAMES

(Initially gathered from bio-files, *Who's Who* and other biographical references, obituaries, ASS/ASA membership lists, conference programs, letterheads, "news" sections of journals, etc.).

Departmental organizations

Committees

Study groups

University-wide organizations

Faculty senate, etc.

Sociological organizations

International associations

National organizations/associations/societies

American Social Science Association

ASS/ASA, etc.

Administration, council, committee service, regional representative, liaison to other organizations, section memberships and activities, etc., etc.

Social Science Research Council

Foundations

National Science Foundation

Grant selection committees

Grant application referee

Ford Foundation

Russell Sage

Cleveland Foundation, etc.

Regional, state, and local societies/chapters

Midwest, Eastern, Wisconsin Sociological Society, Michigan SWS,

Washington DC Sociological Society, etc.

Honor societies

PBK, Sigma Xi, etc.

Topical societies

Society for the Study of Social Problems, Sociologists for Women in Society, Black Sociologists Association, Association for Humanist Sociology, Catholic Sociological Association, International Visual Sociology Association, etc.

Special conferences

World's fairs

White House conferences, etc.

Cognate social science associations (population, economics, statistics, geography, etc.)

Other scholarly or academic associations

AAUP, AAUW, AAAS, etc.

Settlement Houses

Hull House (Chicago)

Residents

Lecturers

Churches

Preaching

Sunday school teaching

Church-related societies or clubs

Church officer

Community organizations

Formal

Women's Clubs (member, officer, committees, talks, exhibits, other activities?)

Civic/Municipal study/improvement organizations

Chicago City Club

Charity Societies (supporter, board member?)

Official Political Party members/officers, speaker at political conventions

Reform organizations, etc.

Participation in semi-organized political movements or specific campaigns at the local level

Abolition

Suffrage

Prohibition

Civil rights

Labor unions, strikes

Informal (dining clubs, Town and Gown discussion groups)

Fraternal

Masonic organizations

Rotary, etc.

Veterans' clubs

National political or issue organizations

National Consumers League, etc.

Related Questions: To what organizations did the faculty members belong and/or participate in? List nature and dates of participation. Officer? Candidate for office? Committee member or service as chair? Discussant at meetings? Organized sessions? Presided at sessions? Presented papers? fund-raiser? Behind-the-scenes mover and shaker, agitator? etc.

IV. STUDENT NAMES AND ACTIVITIES

(Initially gathered from college catalogs (especially for early years), alumni rosters and directories, class rosters, grade books, alumni newsletters, yearbooks, graduation programs, department files, registrar's files, transcripts, theses and dissertations, etc.).

Matriculations

Undergraduate

Majors

Minors

Undeclared

Audits

Notable non-majors

Graduate

Masters' candidates

Doctoral candidates

Undeclared

Audits, tool requirements, etc.

Alumni

Alumni directories

Undergraduate

Graduate

Campus sociology honor societies & clubs

Members, officers, sponsors, etc.

"Sociology club"

Alpha Kappa Delta

Pi Gamma Mu, etc.

Participation in related campus activities

Student publications

Newspapers (editors of student newspapers often contributed unsigned editorials).

Personals

Magazines, chapbooks, yearbooks

Literary societies (these early, non-Greek student societies frequently sponsored oratorical or "debate" contests and published the winning orations in the campus magazine or newspaper sponsored by the society).

Fraternities/sororities

Social reform clubs, YMCA, YWCA, WCTU, etc.

Student government organizations

Student senate

Graduate student association, etc.

Related questions: Which students (or cohorts) were notably productive during their subsequent professional lives? Did the students keep in touch, after graduation, with each other and/or faculty—or go their separate ways? In what ways did curricula and degree requirements change from era to era? Which graduate theses or dissertations were later published as books or in articles? In which graduate programs did undergraduates continue their training? What were the subsequent career paths of the undergraduate and/or graduate students?

V. NAMES OF SOCIOLOGICAL GUEST SPEAKERS

(Initially gathered from yearbooks, alumni newsletters, student newspapers, etc.).

- Departmental symposia
- Campus-wide lectures
- Community-wide lectures

Related questions: What topics were addressed? Were these topics presented prior to or subsequent to publications discussing the same issues? Who invited the speakers? Were the speakers on a “tour” involving other campus?

VI. NAMES AND TITLES OF FACULTY/STUDENT WRITINGS AND PUBLICATIONS

(Initially gathered using standard bibliographical searches from library catalogs (especially the *National Union Catalog*), periodical indexes, footnotes and references, CVs, published bibliographies, biographies and autobiographies, archival scrapbooks, and—eventually— through page-by-page searches of likely source material).

- Dissertations and theses
- Books
- Reports
- University studies, monographs, etc
- Journals
- Mimeographed discussion papers
- Encyclopedia and reference articles
- Newspapers
 - Synopses of lectures in news reports
 - Signed articles
 - Guest opinions
 - Letters to the editor
 - Book reviews
- Book chapters
- Prefaces
- Forewords
- Appendices
- Testimonials
- Eulogies and Obituaries
- Memorial pamphlets
- Inaugural/Centennial addresses
- Poetry, novels, short stories
- Syllabi
- Lectures, lecture outlines, note cards
 - Classroom
 - Professional papers, addresses
 - Talks to community groups, etc.
 - Texts for radio broadcasts
- Abstracts
- Book chapters
- Bibliographies
- Brochures, pamphlets, leaflets
- Atlases, maps, charts, diagrams

Untitled and miscellaneous unpublished manuscripts

Term papers

Works and presentations in non-print media (film, video, cyber-space, tape-recorded lectures, photography, cartoons, interviews)

Editorships

Journal editor

Associate editors

Department editors, e.g., book review editor

Managing editor/office manager

Journal reviewer

Newsletter editor

Book series editor

Publisher/Publishing Activities

University publication committees

Official lists of works published by university faculty, e.g., *Publications of the Members of the University of Chicago, 1902-1916* (University of Chicago Press, 1917).

Books

Privately published works distributed sometimes only to family members, such as autobiographies and memorial pamphlets

Founder of a press, e.g., Irving Horowitz at Transaction Publications

Journals

E.g., *The Forerunner*, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

VII. PHOTOGRAPHS

(Initially gathered from yearbooks, campus histories, alumni newsletters, campus newspapers, college public relations offices, archival files).

Faculty members

Students

Also be alert for pen and ink caricature drawings

Departmental activities

Dinners

Symposia

Annual picnics or outings

Building(s) in which department was/is housed

Department offices